HARAMBEE FLAME

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MATTHEW STELLY ON THE PRESS

FLAME: You and LaRue Nedd are editor and associate editor of the MILWAUKEE COURIER. For how long have you held these positions?

Matt.: Since the beginning of June. As a matter of fact, this past issue was our twentieth paper.

FLAME: Previous to becoming editor of the COURIER, what were you doing?

Matt.: I was working at the Milwaukee Area Community College.

FLAME: Inasmuch as you are an African editor of an organ of the African-American Press, what do you see as the primary function of the African-American Press?

Matt.: Traditionally, the function has been to inform people. But I believe my role is to instigate and provoke because I think that our people are so asleep that, if we just inform them, we'll lull them into a false sense of security and make them think everything's so good that we can just sit around and impart information objectively and they have a choice to accept it or reject it. What we like to do with this paper is piss people off, anger them, inject some kind of seriousness into them. To us, even negative response is positive because a negative response can still lead to action. So that's what we try to do.

FLAME: Let me ask you this question. You mentioned the word "inform." Do you believe, on the basis of what you've seen of the various newspapers and magazines of the African-American Press, that they do an adequate job of even informing?

Matt.: Yes. I think they do a good job of inform-

ing but nothing beyond that because, I think, they have no choice but to limit themselves to giving information due to the power of advertising. I think that, if they decided to do what we're doing, advertisers would pull out; so, as a result, a lot of the papers run just basically NNPA (National Newspaper Publishers Association) copy. For instance, in last week's edition of the OMAHA STAR, a lot of the stuff on the front page - and this is often the case - came from the NNPA--no local copy, nothing about what's going on in the community. Unless you write it or Ernie(Chambers) submits something, it's usually just dry copy. I receive the paper here in Milwaukee, so I'm not going on hearsay.

FLAME: So you see as the function of the MILWAUKEE COURIER that of provoking, that of stimulating thought; basically that of getting people to think. But do you or don't you believe that that ought to be the function of any newspapers that are part of the so-called "black" Press?

Matt.: I do. I think we have an obligation to the community to be served to instigate action. But, unfortunately, in most of the cases, like, for example, the OMAHA STAR, they don't even publish or run off their own papers. Advertisers dictate the size of any black newspaper because of the size of that dollar. So even though I think the function of the black African newspaper should be to instigate people, I don't think the publishers and editors around the country have the guts to do it. Unless it's a big, dramatic story like the riot in Shreveport or the Tawana Brawley case, most black papers stay with the mainstream news. Or, say, some black person gets some appointment or is running for office--mainstream stuff.

FLAME: I notice, since you've been editor of the MILWAUKEE COURIER, there has been a decrease in the amount of high-society type of "information," if you will, in the paper. Has this been by intent?

Matt.: Yeah. Now we do have a thing called "Party Line." We retain that because the lady who writes it, Mattie Belle Woods, has been with the paper for twenty-two years. This thing about covering parties and cotillions to me, that is bull. That's the kind of stuff that makes black people think they are free. Instead of talking about what's going on this weekend, what parties, and that kind of thing, we try to emphasize cultural, political aspects. And if people want to talk about parties and cotillions and so forth, they can use the COMMUNITY JOURNAL, which is another black paper here in Milwaukee.

FLAME: You mentioned earlier the control that advertisers can exercise over African-American newspapers. You say that, since you've been editor, you've tried to do some things with the paper relative to encouraging African people to think, to act and so forth. Have you seen advertising pressure being applied against the COURIER?

Matt.: No. But the COURIER has been here for twenty-five years. I have been able to do some things without that pressure because of a kind of symbiotic relationship between the people with the money and the paper. If the paper does not deal with controversy and is not of calibre, then there will be no ads because we will lose readership. And once we lose readership and advertisers see that, they will cease to see value in buying ad space in our paper. So I've pretty much had free reign in running what I want. In fact, last month we got a hundred

new subscriptions. That's a hundred new subscriptions.

FLAME: Was this a result of a very active subscription campaign? Or was this just something that happened?

Matt.: It's a combination of things. Upstairs they've been on the phones and so forth. But I think it's been due basically to our expanding our distribution sites. And some people, instead of going to the store to get the paper, where they can get it free, prefer to have it mailed to their homes. We have some terrified women out here. Also, we've given a new look to the COURIER. We are trying to make it a magazine--not a magazine and not a newspaper, but a combination of the two. The front page is mostly news, whereas the inside contains news of activities and opinion pieces where a person can say, "Yeah, I agree with what this person is saying" or "This guy's crazy."

FLAME: Okay, let me ask you just a couple more questions. You notice that, in a lot of newspapers and magazines in this country that are owned by African folks--in, for example, EBONY--practically all of the Sisters who are portrayed in features on fashion, models for different kinds of commercial ads, that most of these women who are portrayed tend to be very light-skinned and to have very Caucasian features. While it's true that there are obviously African folks in this country who have such features and they should not be condemned for who their parents were; do you see the African-American Press as having a responsibility to make an effort to counter the establishment of a standard of beauty in which traditional African features are either ignored or treated as if they're somehow ugly?

(Cont. on p. 14)

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee African Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.) is a pan-Africanist newsletter. This means that the FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any artificial distinction between African people based solely on place of birth. Therefore, references to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter the terms used therein to fit our editorial policy.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the view as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(aka David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words, though longer pieces will not be automatically rejected. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. Send your submissions to: HARAMBEE FLAME
Harambee Afrikan Cultural Org.
Attn: Editor/Mondo
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68502-0500

Note on poetry submissions: We are looking for poems that make effective use of imagery, that have beauty and power, and that do not sacrifice such for the sake of uniform rhythm and/or rhyme.

FROM OTHER SOURCES

Money in U.S. African Population

"...Twenty years ago, Blacks earned 57 percent of every dollar whites earned. Today, Blacks earn 56 percent of the white dollar, which is indicative of a broadening gap between the races. That's one economic view.

"There is another. Former Federal Reserve Board Governor Andrew Brimmer of Brimmer & Co., a Washington, D.C. economics and consulting firm, told NNPA that Bureau of Census income figures for Black Americans in 1987 was a whopping $220 billion. Brimmer company's projected 1988 figures for Black income as of Sept. 19, 1988, had escalated to $250 billions!...

"Although the Brimmer figures which truly place Black America's GNP(Gross National Product--the sum total of its goods and services) among the top ten (it is number nine) in the world, they don't tell the whole story. The Bureau of Census figures, impressive as they appear, are only 7.4 percent of total U.S. money income...

"Although Black business sales in 1987, according to the Bureau of Census, was $18.2 billion, this was only a puny .334 percent of total U.S. business sales..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Blacks Hooked On Import Products," which appears on page 1 of the Oct. 13 edition of the COLUMBUS CALL & POST.

Pan-African Conference Held In New York

"'Political unity on the African continent is very much in the cards for the next century', declared Dr. Anthony Martin, addressing the Pan-African conference last week at Hunter College in New York City.

"Martin is an historian and chairman of the Black Studies Department at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Elaborating on the thesis, panelist Elombe Brath agreedthat unity in Africa is important but cautioned that 'to be durable it must be based on criteria other than race'...

"The 3-day conference, the second of its kind in 88 years--not to be confused with the five Pan-African congresses in the first half of this century led by W.E.B. DuBois--was sponsored by the Caribbean Cultural Center in Manhattan. Yhe center promotes African culture in the Americas, mainly through concerts and conferences...

"Later this month, an exhibition of artifacts from the first Pan-African conference is scheduled to open at the 12-year-old nonprofit Caribbean Cultural Center in Manhattan.

"Marta Moreno Vega, center president and executive director, described Pan-Africanism as an effort to strengthen links among blacks all over the world. She said it is an historical discipline in addition to being a political movement inspired by Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois.

"With the conclusion of this conference, several participants are expected to travel to the Institute for Contemporary Arts in London for a 2-day discussion of Pan-Africanism in the 21st century."

-Above passages excerpted from "Pan-African Theory In Today's World," which appears on page 2 of the Oct. 19 edition of THE GUARDIAN(N.Y.).

Afro-centric Childcare In Oakland

"The African People's Free Childcare Collective(in Oakland, CA.) is building for its reopening under the leadership of the African Community Defense Committee...

"The Childcare Collective is set up so that the community - mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers - share the responsibility of childcare.

"This means that you no longer would find single mothers, who in the past were primarily responsible for raising and rearing the children alone for seven days a week, not having the ability to become politically involved and struggle to change the situation...

"The African People's Free Childcare Collective is different from any other school or institution. We are not trying to duplicate the colonial schools that exist, but create a situation where the community controls the education of our children and where African women and parents have a vehicle to make the struggle against the oppression of African people and women...

"The African People's Free Childcare Collective allows our children to be educated by us to learn who they are as African people and the responsibility they have in changing their situation. They also learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic ..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Build The African People's Free Childcare Collective," which appears on page 9 of the Sept./Oct. edition of THE BURNING SPEAR.

Zimbabwe Recognized For Agricultural Progress

"In the eight years since its independence, the Southern African nation of Zimbabwe has become an economic beacon for the struggling countries surrounding it. Against a backdrop of African famine and misery, Zimbabwe has just produced a record harvest of corn, its staple crop, and boasts an 800,000-ton surplus that enables the country to export food to its less fortunate neighbors...

"...nearly 40,000 formerly landless peasant families now own homesteads. The government's support for these and other small producers has enabled the corn production of peasant faamers to increase by 1000% since 1980. In making that leap, small farmers have increased their share of the country's total agricultural production from 8% at independence to 64% today...

"The country's agricultural progress is mirrored in other economic indicators. There has been a post-independence increase of 300% in primary school enrollment and a 500% jump in the enrollment at secondary schools...

"Given such impressive accomplishments, the choice of Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe, as the second winner of the annual Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger was no surprise. But it was cause for celebration for the nearly 2000 people who gathered in New York last month to see him receive the prize, which carries a $100,000 cash award.

"Presented by the Hunger Project, a group dedicated to the global end of hunger, the prize has quickly established itself as one of the most prestigious honors in the fight against hunger..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Nation Is Honored For Its Winning War On Hunger," which appears on page 14 of the Oct. 12 edition of THE GUARDIAN(N.Y.).

The Politics Behind Both's Africa Tour

"South African President P.W. Botha spurred his current diplomatic offensive by visiting another independent African state last week. The apartheid leader met briefly on Oct. 15 with Felix Houphouet-Boigny, the octogenarian leader of the West African country of Ivory Coast...

"No details emerged as to what Botha discussed in Houphouet-Boigny's home town of Yamossoukro. Presumably Angola was high on the agenda--Houphouet-Boigny supports the South African-backed rebel movement Unita, whose leader, Jonas Savimbi, travels on an Ivory Coast passport.

"Botha's string of visits to African states is clearly intended to show that Pretoria is breaking out of its isolation on the continent. This message is aimed at white South African voters: Botha knows that his National Party is in danger of losing very badly to the ultrarightist Conservative party in the Oct. 26 municipal elections.

"Some predictions are that the Conservatives, with their ideology of absolute racial separation, will sweep the board in the Afrikaner heartland of the Transvaal. Botha is thus trying to win back Afrikaans-speaking whites by showing that his policies are working. Vote for us, he is saying, and we will end South Africa's international isolation without making any fundamental concessions..."

-Above passages excerpted from "After Tour, Botha Still Isolated," which appears on page 12 of the Oct. 26 edition of THE GUARDIAN(N.Y.)

Economic Factors In Algerian Protests And Rioting

"...the fall in world prices for hydrocarbons has in recent years cost Algeria over half its earnings closing the gap between the country's foreign earnings($8 billion) and service on its debt($5 billion). At the same time, the population has more than doubled since independence, going from nine million in 1960 to nearly 24 million today, most of them young people with no jobs and no prospects, even though they have had more schooling than their parents...

"President Chadli Bendjedid has been introducing economic liberalization reforms recommended by the West. As usual, the first visible results have been merely to accentuate the gap between the rich minority who profit and the discontented majority. .."

-Above passages excerpted from "Desperation Of Young Algerians Won't Go Away With Repression," which appears on page 9 of the Oct. 26-Nov. 1 edition of IN THESE TIMES(Chicago, ILL).

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To subscribe to the HARAMBEE FLAME, send money order or check in the amount of $6.00 to:

HARAMBEE FLAME
Harambee Afrikan Cultural Org.
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68502-0500

KWANZAA Greeting Cards

KWANZAA

(Dec. 26-Jan 1)

Umoja - Unity

Kujichagulia - Self-determination

Ujima - Collective Work & Responsibility

Ujamaa - Cooperative Economics

Nia - Purpose

Kuumba - Creativity

Imani - Faith

May this season of Kwanzaa move us to rededicate ourselves to those traditional African values by which our ancestors achieved greatness.

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To order your set(one card for each of the seven days of Kwanzaa), send a money order or check for $3.50 to Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization

P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68502-0500

Each set comes with envelopes.

Matt.: Yeah, I think we have a responsibility to do it. But I don't think the majority of the black Press will accept that responsibility. It's a little like the question you asked about the high-society mentality, the thing about the cotillions. As far as the question of light-skin black people goes, I think we have a responsibility to present a balanced picture. But I'm more concerned about the psychological and political. For instance, most of the black people EBONY covers are athletes and entertainers. And most of the people who are featured in the black newspapers in the country are either political lackeys or basically individuals who have made it into somebody's system. So heavy bloods get no play, like Ernie(Chambers). If I were editor of the OMAHA STAR, Ernie would have a weekly column or, at the very least, there'd be a reporter assigned to the legislature to cover nothing but Ernie's activities.

But as a result of our being concerned about certain kinds of black people who are of white mind, those black people who are in the System but who take positions that are pro-black get neglected by much of our press, except during times of crisis when we work up a fever and sell a bunch of papers by getting controversial figures who can say something to catch people's eyes.

FLAME: Instead of asking another specific question, let me just ask if you have any concluding comment you'd like to make.

Matt.: Just that I think that Lincoln(Nebraska) should have a black newspaper because there are 2,000 black people there, most of them probably living around the Malone Center. And, beyond that, I think there ought to be a relevant black newspaper in Omaha. The OMAHA STAR is much too dependent on the

(Concl. on p. 17)

Announcements

Low-income families in Lincoln who wish to make application for receipt of Thanksgiving food baskets should contact Barbara Kelley at the Malone Community Center at 474-1110.

The Theatre Art Galleries, the High Point Human Relations Commission, and Slade Companies Inc. are sponsoring the "Third Annual Afro-American Artists Competition & Exhibition." Cash prizes will be awarded in three areas: painting, graphic art, and sculpture. Jurying will be from slides. And there is an entry fee. For additional information, write to: Theatre Art Galleries
220 E. Commerce St.
Highpoint, N.C. 27260

"Soul Fire" is the name of a recently introduced arts program designed for African-American youth in fifth and sixth grade. The program includes instruction and oral history in the areas of: dance, instrumental music, drama, visual arts, photography, and vocal music. Classes are being conducted on the Metropolitan Community College Fort Omaha campus at 30th & Fort Sts. in Omaha. For additional information, call 455-7927.

The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization's Kwanzaa program this year will be held on the 31 of December. If you are interested in doing some kind of performance or other presentation related to African or African-American culture, please notify us as soon as possible: Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization; P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502-0500; 471-3161(ext. 380 or 379), between the hours of 12:30-3:00, Monday through Friday.

THAT YEAR

by Ella Robinson

Summer came in June
That year to turn the green grass
Brown.
Roses did not bloom;
Even sunflowers
Waited till July
Like mobile rivers, gold
They came late, faded early.

For me Africa sizzled,
As Atlanta had before.
The whole countryside
Seemed molten, glorious
With palm trees, no pines:

There was palm wine, porcupine,
Yams, hot pepper soup,
Peppers with my grits,
Africa! Nigeria!

No song birds
Or Cicada heat beneath the wing,
No unhappy snakes, just tales
Of green flashes by chance
In knee high grass.

And I might see these tidbits
Years afterwards,
Might love them as we love at first sight
The thought of love, windows ablaze.

The like falls as the thought
Comes to nothing,
Using the noise of a clock
To drench heavy heat
Of summer sun ruddy, lazy
With pivot, the like
Hand to know that fall is coming.

.....

Ella, who is a frequent contributor to the FLAME, visited Africa for the first time this past summer.

WORLD HERALD(a Caucasian-owned paper, the only daily in Omaha), and that kind of thing, for it to be the really powerful kind of vehicle that it could be.

The above interview with Matthew Stelly was conducted on October 11, 1988. Both Matthew and Brother Nedd are from Omaha.

BACK IN TIME

Songhay's greatness was due to something more than the remarkable expansion of its empire over a territory larger than the continent of Europe. That was great, but greater by far was the grand scale on which the revival of learning spread among the Blacks of West Africa--The Western Sudan, or "Land of the Blacks." Three of the principal centers of learning were at Jenne, Gao and Timbuktu. At the head of the educational system at Timbuktu was the world famous University of Sankore, drawing students from all West Africa and scholars from different foreign countries. It was especially noted for its high standard of scholarship and, therefore, exacting admission requirements(about which there were some complaints).

The University structure consisted of a (1)Faculty of Law, (2)Medicine and surgery, (3)Letters, (4) Grammar, (5)Geography, and (6)Art. (Here "Art" had to do with such practical training as manufacturing, building and other allied crafts. After the basic training the expertise required was through the traditional apprenticeship system in the various craft guilds.)

There were thousands of students from all parts of West Africa and other regions. We have no record of the exact number. The accounts also mention the large number of scientists, doctors, lawyers and other scholars at the University without giving the exact number--perhaps not considered necessary in the 15th and 16th centuries.

-Source: THE DESTRUCTION OF BLACK CIVILIZATION
by Chancellor Williams